

# “How can I reduce the risk of my vehicle being stolen?”

In 2002 in Virginia, 18,388 offenses of Motor Vehicle Thefts were reported, amounting to a total value loss of \$111,772,927.

Also,

There were 67,856 thefts from motor vehicles amounting to a value loss of \$32,051,203

There were 15,971 thefts of motor vehicle parts and accessories amounting to a value loss of \$7,260,484

(Source: Crime in Virginia, 2002)

***Don't make it easy for professional thieves or joy-riders to take your wheels!***

## **Protect your vehicle**

§ Lock your car and pocket the key when you leave—even if just for a minute.

§ Close windows all the way and make sure the trunk is locked.

§ Control your keys. Never leave an identification tag on your key ring. If your keys are lost or stolen. An ID tag could help a thief locate your car and burglarize your home.

§ Don't leave your registration inside your vehicle; carry it with you. Important identification papers or credit cards should never be left in the glove compartment.

§ If carrying packages or valuable items, store them in your trunk if possible. If you do leave packages, clothing or other articles in the car, make sure they are out of sight.

§ Park in well-lit, busy areas. Avoid leaving your vehicle in unattended parking lots for long periods of time. If you park in a lot where you must leave a key, leave the ignition key only, to protect items in the trunk or the glove box.

§ When buying a car, ask about the anti-theft options such, as steering column locks, alarms, switches that interrupt the fuel or electronic systems and locks for tape decks, batteries and gas tanks. Many insurance companies offer reduced rates to owners who install security devices.

§ Keep your car's Vehicle Identification Number (VIN), and a complete description, in a safe place at home. Since 1969, the federal government has required manufacturers to engrave a unique number, the VIN, on all passenger cars in one visible and several hidden locations. One VIN is engraved on a metal plate on the dashboard near the windshield. VINs of stolen cars are registered with the FBI's National Crime Information Center.

## **Bicycles, motorcycles and trail bikes**

§ Park out-of-sight in a garage or basement, or use a cover.

§ Engrave with an "Operation Identification" number recommended by local law enforcement.

§ Lock all bicycles with a case-hardened chain or a cable and lock, winding the cable through the frame and both wheels and then around a fixed object.

§ Use the fork lock found on most street motorcycles. For extra protection of your bicycle or motorcycle, invest in a heavy U-shaped lock made of extremely hard steel that cannot be hacksawed, or a casehardened chain and a sturdy padlock.

§ Watch out for key numbers! Some motorcycle manufacturers stamp the key number on the lock. With this number, anyone can go to a key maker and have a key cut that will fit perfectly. Many key makers ask for identification, but don't take chances—write down your key number, store the number in a safe place, and then file it off the lock.

## **Trucks and RVs**

§ Many specialized vehicles don't have VINs and should be marked with another ID number, such as a driver's license number.

§ Lock up easy-to-carry items like motors and camping gear before leaving your vehicle.

§ Use secured "toppers" or tool boxes for your truck. Don't assume a thief can't lift a box because it's heavy.

## **Cellular phone/CB alert!**

- Cellular phones and citizens' band radios are popular targets for thieves.

- Locking the car, parking in a well-lit place and removing antennas offer some protection.

- To protect your CB radio from theft, install it in a slide mount so it can be taken into the home or office, or locked in the trunk, when the car is not occupied.

- Keep a record of serial and model numbers and engrave an identifying number on the phone or radio. Another alternative is a factory-installed unit which is harder to rip out than a portable one. Anti-theft devices also are available. Buy cellular phones and CBs from reputable dealers.

## **License plates**

- License plates frequently are stolen from cars and used on stolen cars used in other crimes.

- Get in the habit of checking your plates when you drive.

- A few drops of solder on the bolts, or blurring the threads, can help safeguard your plates.

## **Avoid buying a stolen vehicle**

§ Verify that the VIN plate is intact

and check it against the VIN on the ownership documents.

§ Ask the seller about the vehicle's history, past financing and insurance information.

§ Verify this information with the bank or insurance company.

§ Be wary when purchasing used auto parts—you could be patronizing a “chop shop” where stolen goods are sold, and you could be indirectly encouraging auto theft.

### If it happens to you

If your vehicle is broken into or stolen, inform law enforcement immediately. Stolen vehicles may be used in the commission of other crimes. Your quick action may both aid in recovering your vehicle and preventing its use for illegal purposes.

### Take action

§ Get your Neighborhood Watch group to look out for abandoned and suspicious vehicles or bikes, and educate members on preventing vehicle theft.

§ Check your state's laws regarding salvage titles, secure ownership documents and VIN inspection programs. Are they sufficient protection against professional thieves and “chop shops”?

§ Engrave an ID number in several locations on your car or bike, such as the door frame, bumper or under the hood and trunk lids.

Source : National Crime Prevention Council

Fill in the records form below for your car and file it away in a safe location.

### ABOUT MY VEHICLE

P&R  
ID# or VIN

Year

License #

Make

Identifying Marks

Model

Insurance Co.

Color

Policy #

# Vehicle Security

*You can prevent vehicle theft!  
Most cars are taken by amateurs  
who can be stopped fairly easily.  
You can increase your protection  
against this type of crime by taking  
the following sensible precautions:*

## Lock up

§ An unlocked car is an open invitation to a car thief. Lock up when you leave your car, and take the keys with you.

§ Lock the trunk or tailgate.

§ Close all windows — professional thieves have tools that unlock cars through the smallest openings.

§ Be sure vent or wind-wing windows are shut tight.

§ When you park the car, remove cellular phones, cassette players and other valuable possessions. Do not leave gift-wrapped packages or cameras lying on the seat. Lock all valuables in your trunk, or take them with you.

§ Lock your car even if you are making a quick stop at the gas station, convenience store or mini-mall.

## Park carefully

§ Don't leave an auto in unattended public parking lots for an extended period. A car is five times more likely to be stolen from

an unattended lot than from the street or an attended lot.

§ If possible, park your car in a lot where you don't have to leave your keys.

§ Never attach a tag with your name and address to your key ring. If the keys are lost or stolen, the tag will lead the thief directly to your car and your home. If you have to leave your keys with a parking attendant, leave only the ignition key.

§ At night, park in well-lit areas with lots of people around.

§ Turn wheels sharply toward the curb when parking, this makes it extra difficult for thieves to tow your car.

## Operation I.D.

§ With an electric engraver, etch your driver's license number (preceded by the letters "VA") on cassette players and other valuable items.

§ Record your vehicle identification number (located on a small metal plate on the dashboard of newer cars) and store it in a safe place.

§ Keep the vehicle registration in your wallet or purse, not in your car.

## Use anti-theft devices

- When buying a car, check the manufacturer's list of anti-theft options, such as interior hood and trunk releases, locking steering columns and others.

- Consider the purchase and installation of security devices, such as:
  - Interior hood lock release.

- Second ignition switch or “kill switch” to prevent electrical current from reaching the coil distributor.
- Fuel switch to prevent fuel from reaching the carburetor.
- Locking gas cap.
- Locking devices for batteries, wheels, decks, etc.
- Alarm device to activate a siren, horn or lights – or all three – to frighten the thief away.
- Device that attaches to the steering wheel or brake pedal.

## **Carjacking**

This violent, random form of auto theft is on the rise. A driver of any vehicle can be a target of someone with a weapon. It can happen anywhere, day or night. Here are some precautions:

- § Keep your doors locked.
- § Park in well-lit, busy areas.
- § Be alert of your surroundings and of people approaching your vehicle.
- § Stick with the traffic, avoid lightly traveled streets, especially after dark.
- § Keep car and house keys on separate key chains.
- § Keep the garage door opener in your purse or briefcase.
- § When stopped in traffic, always leave enough room to make an emergency getaway.
- § If someone is threatening you with a weapon, give up the vehicle — it’s not worth your life.

## ***How to prevent theft of other motor vehicles***

*Thefts of snowmobiles, motorcycles, boats and trail-bikes also are increasing. Many of the same precautions that apply to cars also apply to recreational vehicles.*

### **Lock It**

§ Make sure all easy-to-carry items like motors, water skis and camping gear are locked up before leaving your vehicle.

### **Chain It**

§ Vehicles carried on trailers should be secured with a strong chain and padlock.

§ When the trailer is not attached to your car, secure it with a heavy chain and lock to a stationary object.

§ Chain your motorcycle or snowmobile to a stationary object, such as a lamppost or sewer grating. Even when your vehicle is in the garage, use a heavy chain and padlock that resists conventional steel hacksaw blades.

**Adapted from Vehicle Security,  
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Center, California Attorney  
General’s Office.**